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Extra Stimulation in Intermediate Grade Reading.

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Three types of extra stimulation in reading are discussed: extra teacher time devoted to teaching reading, extra student time devoted to practice in reading, and extra motivation and reinforcement leading to greater amounts of student reading outside the school. Problems are created (1) when teaching time spent on reading is increased in the proportion of time devoted to any one student's reading or (2) when student time devoted to independent reading in the classroom is increased at the expense of teacher instruction in reading. The most promising alternative noted is that of increasing student time spent in reading outside of school. One of the best procedures for accomplishing this, the study concludes, is contingency management in which outside reading is heavily reinforced. References are included. (RT)

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Invited to CRA, Knoxville
11 AM, April 5, 1968

An Abstract Of

Extra Stimulation in Reading in the Intermediate Grades

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Three types of extra stimulation are worthy of consideration; extra teacher time devoted to teaching reading, extra student time devoted to practice in reading, and extra motivation and reinforcement leading to greater amounts of student reading outside of school.

Instructional plans for increasing teacher time devoted to reading as yet have not achieved the desired results. Frequently increased teacher time spent on reading accomplishes no increase in that proportion of time devoted to any one student's reading.

Increasing student time devoted to reading independently in the classroom frequently results in decreasing time spent by the teacher in teaching any one student. Instructional plans must be devised to increase both student reading and instructional time devoted to

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reading by the teacher, or to increase one without decreasing the other.

The alternative which seems likely to be the most productive is that of increasing student time spent in reading outside of school. One of the best procedures for accomplishing this is contingency management in which outside reading is heavily reinforced.

EXTRA STIMULATION IN INTERMEDIATE GRADE READING

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Under the topic of extra stimulation in reading, a large number of procedures and materials can be included. These may be broadly classified in three groups:

1. provision of more instructional time,
2. provision of more time for reading without instruction,
3. provision of greater motivation and/or reinforcement for reading.

Let us first consider plans for providing more instructional time devoted to reading.

One common plan for providing more time for reading instruction is to assign homogeneous groups to classrooms for reading instruction. In this way the teacher can make one presentation appropriate for the total group and not be forced to dissipate his labors by contriving "busy work" which wastes time for two-thirds of the class while he teaches the other third.

The big disadvantage in this plan is that teachers frequently believe that they can adequately teach such a total group with one presentation. When administrators take the responsibility for individualizing instruction by assigning homogeneous classes for reading, teachers frequently take no responsibility for further individualizing. The result is "no gain."

A second plan often advanced is to departmentalize intermediate grade instruction. Some teachers are assigned to language arts classes, some to mathematics, some to social science, and some to natural science. Children move from room to room when bells ring, just as high school classes do.

The disadvantage with this plan is that it results in even less reading instruction than does the first plan mentioned. When only one teacher is responsible for reading improvement, less daily time is devoted to instruction in reading than is normally the case in intermediate grades.

There is one saving factor, however, in these plans for providing more stimulation in reading through providing more time for reading instruction. This

saving factor is the lack of proof that reading improvement is directly related to instructional time spent on reading. At this point the only research evidence known to this author is that reported by Harris and Serwer in describing the Craft Project.[1] In this project it was found that teacher time spent on reading instruction was positively correlated with reading achievement among first graders, although time spent on activities in supportive areas (other language arts) was not. However, this research with first grades cannot safely be generalized to the intermediate grades.

It may well be that less lecture and demonstration instruction and more time spent by children in reading silently and/or independently is the best way to promote reading achievement. If learning by doing is the best way of learning, then learning to read by reading could seem to be the best way of learning to read.

Among instructional programs which emphasize large amounts of independent reading we would list Individualized Reading as described by Veatch,[2] and the SRA Reading Laboratories[3] of Don Parker. In both these programs the child works and reads extensively with

minimal teacher intervention. Another reading program of this nature is that which is part of the Individually Prescribed Instruction project of the Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh.[4] This program relies heavily upon Sullivan Associates' Programmed Reading.[5] Again, the child proceeds independently. The major task of his teacher is writing prescriptions which the student fills himself. His progress is checked by teacher aides.

Unfortunately these programs have their own accompanying disadvantages. Frequently "individualized reading" instruction, when attempted by a misguided or misinformed teacher, becomes no reading instruction. The daily reading time is simply a library period. The SRA Reading Laboratories and similar boxed materials are not complete instructional programs, but simply good supplements to a program. Programmed Reading is no better and no worse than basal reading programs. Its goal is to develop the skills of reading so that they may be applied to a variety of tasks--recreational reading, informational reading, and study. It has not been demonstrated to generate more independent reading

of materials outside the program than that generated by the program involved in any other set of materials.

Both of the first two classes of extra stimulation in reading, more instructional time and more independent reading time, are thought to be variables which generate extra growth in reading ability. However, if increasing the one decreases the other, little good will come from great efforts.

It is apparent, therefore, that in order to affect a big improvement in the levels of reading presently achieved by intermediate grade students, we need to increase both instructional time and independent reading time or to find a way to increase the one without decreasing the other.

One way would be to hire more teachers and thereby decrease class size. A second is to involve more adults in the operation of schools. Too much teacher time in today's schools is spent in collecting lunch money, taking attendance, and calling out spelling words for children to write. Too much teacher time is spent in scoring tests, supervising trips to the washroom, and calling upon children who are next in line to recite.

In summary, too much teacher time is spent in non-teaching activities.

Schools could profit from examination of the innovations in hospitals during the past twenty years. Schools could have auxiliary units, candy-stripers, aides, orderlies, and gray ladies. Not only could it be done, but the expense would be minimal. The effect of introducing more adults into the school program would be that student teacher ratio at any one time in any one classroom could be drastically reduced and more time could be spent in teaching reading, without taking more time from the school day of any one student.

In the promotion of outside reading, teachers can profit from the advice of behavioral engineers. The specialists in that branch of pscychology believe that by a technique known as contingency management, individuals can be caused to behave in any desired fashion. The trick is to make a "contract" with a student to do a very small amount of work and, when it is completed, to reward him by allowing him to indulge in some preferred activity. It's like saying, "Eat your spinach, then you may have dessert." The teacher might say, "If you will read this page (or this story, or this book)

at home this evening, tomorrow you can paint a picture about it." Or the teacher might say, "If you will read this selection this week, next week you can be first in line when we go to the playground."

In order to be successful with this technique, one must know what rewards are considered to be worth working for by the student in question. For many students, being allowed to take a book home to read is rewarding in itself. For those students we do not need to promote outside reading. They're already doing it. However, we can use contingency management to increase the breadth and depth of their reading.

We also have other procedures. We can find the interests of our students and take care that the offerings on the shelves of our school and classroom libraries meet those interests. We can involve parents as helpers if we are careful to prescribe exactly how they may help. We can see to it that our best readers read, enjoy, and talk about some of our simplest books. In this fashion we remove any stigma that might be attached to our poor readers because they read those books. We can read good books aloud and encourage oral reading groups who pass one book around as they take turns reading from it.

If we are short on trade books, we can make them by cutting up old anthologies and stapling cardboard binders on them. We can make a library stacks from graded weekly newspapers and soon accumulate a variety of graded writings on a vast number of topics. We can encourage children who have books to bring them to school for trading, loaning, or simply making the point that books can be purchased and owned by individuals. And finally, we can talk to our classes about books we have enjoyed and still enjoy. Enthusiasm is contagious.

In summary, three types of extra stimulation in reading for the intermediate grades have been proposed. These include providing more instructional time, providing more independent reading time in school, and causing more time to be spent on reading outside of school. It is assumed, but as yet not proven beyond doubt, that increased time devoted to reading and to instruction in reading will result in greater progress in achieving reading growth. Several plans for increasing reading time have been discussed. All three types of plans have strengths and weaknesses. One common weakness is that increasing one type of time allocation decreases

other types of time allocation. The task for the individual teacher and school is to find the "right blend of the world's finest" methods.

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